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UNCLAS ACCRA 002316

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

PLEASE PASS TO JOHN LYLE AND ERENI ROESS AT INL

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: GHANA'S INTERIOR MINISTER DISCUSSES NARCOTICS, PRISONS

REF: ACCRA 01644

1. (U) Summary: On November 2, the Ambassador paid a courtesy call on the Minister of Interior Papa Owusu Ankomah. The Minister emphasized Ghana's increasing role as a transit point for narcotics and pressed for further narcotics enforcement assistance. He also acknowledged Ghana's poor prison conditions and defects in the criminal justice system and said the Government of Ghana recognizes the need to address them. End Summary.

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LAW ENFORCEMENT ASSISTANCE  
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2. (U) The Ambassador noted the Government of Ghana's strong record of law enforcement cooperation and pointed out the breadth of law enforcement assistance the U.S. government plans to provide to Ghana. This includes police training, \$250,000 in anti-human trafficking training and assistance and \$200,000 in additional narcotics enforcement assistance (see reftel). The Ambassador also said the Embassy had nominated a number of law enforcement officials for International Visitor Programs.

3. (SBU) The Minister expressed concern about increasing narcotics traffic through Ghana, particularly cocaine trafficked from South America into Europe through Ghana. He noted that his law enforcement agencies are surveilling South American groups who do not appear to have any gainful employment or legitimate business activity in Ghana. (Note: The head of Ghana Police Service's Narcotics Unit told the Embassy he suspects Colombians now resident in Ghana are involved in the drug trade.) The minister said he would submit a written proposal to the U.S. Embassy seeking further assistance to combat drug trafficking in Ghana.

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PRISON ISSUES  
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4. (U) The Ambassador raised the issue of congested prisons and the thousands of prisoners on remand who have never received a hearing or a trial. (In his prior role as Attorney General, the Minister called for a review of all prisoners on remand in the fall 2004 after a senior Ghana Prisons Service official reported finding prisoners on remand for up to 10 years.)

5. (U) The Minister said he knew prisons were crowded and in poor condition. According to Owusu Ankomah, the Prisons Service had undertaken some improvements in the last year although he did not offer specifics or indicate whether inmate capacity had increased. He said incarcerating prisoners was costly, and the Government of Ghana will need to explore community-based sentencing as an alternative to prison terms to reduce its inmate population.

BRIDGEWATER